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Philip's Wife. A Play
Frank G. Layton, M.R.C.S.

London: A. C. Fifield, 13
Clifford's Inn, E.C. 1s. net

Philip's Wife. A Play
by Frank G. Layton, M.R.C.S.



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Philip's Wife. A Play in
Three Acts by Frank G.
Layton ("Stephen Andrew")

London : A. C. Fifield, 13
Clifford's Inn, E.C. 1914

TO THE
HON. THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE COLONIES
AND
THE HON. THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE DOMINIONS

Preface

I THINK it unlikely that this play will be produced in England—at any rate, for a long time to come. Friends of mine, who ought to know, say that the Censor would not pass it—I cannot imagine why. (It is only fair to the Censor to say that his opinion has not, so far, been asked.) The play is not improper: it certainly does not incite to evil doing. It does no more than call attention to one of the many sides of the Doctor's Dilemma.

What ought we to do? Frequently we doctors learn that a young man is going to marry, when we know that he ought not to marry. We can warn him, if he gives us the chance. We can point out to him the risk, the almost complete certainty that he will wreck the girl's life; but if he chooses to disregard our advice, we are powerless. We can't tell; for a confession to a doctor is as secret and as binding as a confession to a priest. And, if we were to tell, we should be liable to an action at law which would end in heavy damages against us, and, quite likely, professional ruin.

There ought to be some way out, some way of preventing girls from plunging blindfold into a sea of misery. I imagine no one will deny that marriage does mean misery to numbers of women—the women who, almost at once, develop bad health; the women who bear dead baby after dead baby, or babies that are born only to sicken and die.

I have no desire to play the part of alarmist. I know that the statement that the bulk of men are unfit for marriage is a grotesque libel upon my sex. I do, however, wish to call attention to the fact that a girl ought

to know what marriage may mean to her and to her children ; to the thoroughly reasonable suggestion that a girl should have some guarantee that the man she marries is fit to marry. The average man is fit ; but there are many who are not. We see the consequences in our consulting-rooms, in the out-patient rooms of our hospitals, at the bedside. Philip's Wife is no figment of my imagination. I have met her and her sisters over and over again ; and I have seen Philip's children still more often. Poor little beggars, damned before their birth, what chance have they ? I wonder how many who may happen to read this have any idea of the pitiful lot of the child who is born with the taint of inherited disease in him.

There still are plenty of excellent folk who believe fervently that "there are some subjects that ought *never* to be mentioned to women." The superstition that women should be kept in ignorance of certain subjects which affect them vitally dies hard. I want to help to kill it. It seems to me reasonable that if a subject is fit for men to talk about, it is equally fit for women to talk about. As a doctor—a privileged person—I find that women are keen enough to talk about the Things That Matter, if they are given a chance, and that it is only the inherent bashfulness of men that prevents the Evils That Matter being discussed openly. For myself, I think they ought to be discussed openly. It is because I think this that I have written this play.

I expect I shall be charged with plagiarising Brieux. It is fair to myself to state that when I wrote this play I had not so much as heard of "Damaged Goods."

FRANK G. LAYTON.

WALSALL, *March*, 1914.

Persons of the Play

ROBERT ANTHONY, M.D., F.R.C.P.	<i>A consulting physician</i>	Aged 45
JAMES DEXTER, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.	<i>A general practitioner</i>	„ 30
SEPTIMUS MORTON.	<i>A crude and rather vulgar manufacturer</i>	„ 55
MRS. MORTON.	<i>His wife (neither crude nor vulgar)</i>	„ 50
PHILIP MORTON.	<i>Their son</i>	„ 25
THE REVEREND PERCIVAL GRANT.	<i>Vicar of Middlewich</i>	„ 60
MRS. GRANT.	<i>His wife</i>	„ 55
JEAN GRANT.	<i>Their daughter</i>	„ 21
SERVANT		

SCENES

ACT I

*The Study in Septimus Morton's house, at Middlewich,
a busy Midland manufacturing town*

ACTS II AND III

The Study at Middlewich Vicarage

Philip's Wife

Act I

SCENE.—*A Room, known as "the Study," in SEPTIMUS MORTON'S house, at Middlewich. MORTON is a well-to-do manufacturer, rather vulgar, distinctly purse-proud, who has married above him. The room is very comfortably furnished, with a thick carpet, plenty of easy chairs, good engravings on the walls. In the middle of the far wall is the door, with book-cases on either side. In the left wall is the fire-place, with a cupboard between it and the front of the Stage. In the right wall is a window: beyond the fire-place is a small writing-table.*

TIME.—*Midwinter, about eleven in the morning. As the Curtain goes up MRS. MORTON comes in, followed by DR. ANTHONY and DR. DEXTER. ANTHONY is very well dressed and very precise: DEXTER is a cheerful, rather casual person, dressed in blue serge jacket suit.*

MRS. MORTON. This is Mr. Morton's study, Dr. Anthony. You will be quite private in here. I dare say you and Dr. Dexter will like to have a talk about the invalids. I *do* hope you will have good news for me.

ANTHONY (*bows*). Thank you. This will do splendidly.

MRS. MORTON. May I send you something? A glass of sherry and a biscuit . . . ?

ANTHONY. Oh, no, thank you very much.

MRS. MORTON. Then I will leave you.

(She goes out, DEXTER opening the door for her. ANTHONY strolls about the room examining the pictures.)

ANTHONY. Seems to do himself pretty well. Nice engravings, those. Some of these rich manufacturing persons are getting quite cultured.

DEXTER *(standing before the fire with his hands in his pockets)*. Yes, aren't they?

(Apparently ANTHONY amuses him.)

ANTHONY. Plenty of money, I suppose?

DEXTER. Heaps. Gets it out of some patent kind of steel he's invented. By the way, you may as well charge him a pretty stiff fee. He'll think all the more of you if you do.

ANTHONY *(turning to DEXTER with interest)*. Right. Thanks: I will.

DEXTER. People in these parts always like to get a very expensive doctor if they can—especially if the patient is going to die. Reckon to pay him out of the insurance money, I suppose. Quaint idea.

ANTHONY. It's a custom we ought to encourage.

DEXTER *(airily)*. Oh, we encourage it all right. For instance, I've got you here to help me diagnose these two cases, though I know quite well what's the matter with both of them; and I've told you to be expensive.

ANTHONY *(chillingly. He seems not quite pleased. Evidently he is accustomed to more deference from general practitioners)*. Are you on the Panel?

DEXTER *(looking sharply at him, with a quick smile)*. Rather! Oh, yes. I'm a Panel Doctor.

ANTHONY (*condescendingly*). Then you have my sincere sympathy.

DEXTER. What for? I'm quite happy. But, I say, what are you going to tell these people?

ANTHONY. Ah, yes—it is about time we began to discuss the business in hand.

DEXTER (*shrugs his shoulders*). No need to discuss much. The cases are plain enough. Old chap drinks: young chap—well, he's been unlucky. How much are you going to tell 'em? That's the main point.

ANTHONY (*sharply*). I say—why did you get a second opinion at all?

DEXTER. Me! I didn't. They'd heard of you, and wanted you; so of course I agreed. Who am I to get between you and a fee? I didn't need any second opinion, but I said I'd be jolly glad to meet you; and so I am. *They pay for it: I don't.*

ANTHONY (*out of his depth*). Do you mean to say you didn't really need a second opinion?

DEXTER (*cheerfully*). Of course I do. I suppose it sounds rather rude—but we G.P.'s very seldom call in you consulting people because we are up a stump. We call you in because the family wants you. They like to have the satisfaction of feeling that "everything possible has been done." Having paid one of you a big fee, they can arrange for the funeral with a quiet mind.

ANTHONY (*laughing bitterly*). You put it bluntly. I hadn't heard before that that was the function of a consulting physician.

DEXTER (*airily*). Hadn't you? I'm only telling you what I want you to tell these people.

ANTHONY (*bewildered*). Surely you don't expect me to say all this to these people! They might object to paying that fee.

DEXTER (*laughs*). Of course I don't. I only want you to tell them the truth. Tell the old chap to cut down his whiskey; and for God's sake tell the boy that he mustn't marry for at least two years, and must be treated. *Treated*, mind.

ANTHONY. But do you mean——? Is there a girl?

DEXTER (*seriously*). There is a girl.

ANTHONY (*thoroughly roused*). Good Lord!

DEXTER. And such a nice girl, too. Parson's daughter—of course. It's always a parson's daughter. *You* know. But this is the real article.

ANTHONY. And that young whelp——

DEXTER (*interrupts sharply*). He isn't a young whelp. He's a very decent chap. But he's ignorant—*ignorant*, because they won't let *us* in. *They* make the rules: he pays. See?

ANTHONY (*stroking his chin*). Yes, I suppose so. But—I say, it's rough luck for that girl.

DEXTER. It is; and it'll be worse if we don't interfere.

ANTHONY. Hm—yes. But interfering's rather a ticklish business. We can't give the boy away. Secrets of the confessional—you know.

DEXTER. No, we can't give him away. We can only talk to him, and, if he'll let us, to his father.

ANTHONY. Of course we can talk to him; but I doubt whether it will be much good. I've talked to a good many young men in my time; but precious few of them did what I told them.

DEXTER. With the inevitable consequences.

ANTHONY (*nods*). With the inevitable consequences.

DEXTER (*beginning to walk to and fro, across the room*). Rather beastly, isn't it? People ought to have a clean bill of health before they marry.

ANTHONY. Of course they ought—but they don't. Public opinion's dead against it—Heaven knows why. The Public in general seems rather suspicious of us doctors.

DEXTER (*cheerfully*). Naturally.

ANTHONY (*looking at his watch*). Hadn't we better go back to the patients? We are agreed as to the diagnosis.

DEXTER (*nods*). Yes. You'll tell 'em the truth, won't you?

ANTHONY (*coldly*). Certainly I shall tell them the truth.

DEXTER. I mean the whole truth—without any trimmings. Tell the old boy to go easy with the whiskey, and insist that the son shall not marry for a long time, *and be treated*.

ANTHONY (*sharply*). Haven't you been treating him?

DEXTER. Only for a week. Young men are usually shy of the family doctor for that complaint. They prefer quacks. That's where the Panel Patient scores.

ANTHONY (*very shortly*). Panel Patients have no business to be treated for this sort of thing—as Panel Patients, I mean.

DEXTER. Why not?

ANTHONY. Because they have brought their trouble on themselves.

DEXTER. Hm—yes. So has the average man with indigestion. Would you bar him, too?

ANTHONY (*turning to the door*). That's ridiculous.

(*Before he can reach the door it opens, and PHILIP MORTON comes in. He is a tall, well-set-up young man, fair, with a slight moustache. He is wearing pyjamas and a dressing-gown.*)

PHILIP. Hullo, can I come in? I say, there's no

need to worry your heads about *my* complaint. I know what's the matter.

ANTHONY (*looking rather severely at him*). Oh, do you? Yes, come in, Mr. Morton. We want to talk to you.

PHILIP. Right. (*He shuts the door, sits down in an arm-chair, and lights a cigarette.*)

ANTHONY. It's serious, you know.

PHILIP (*unmoved*). Is it? That's what Dexter said. As you both say so, I suppose it's true. How long will it take to cure me?

ANTHONY. We cannot tell you. You see, you have neglected yourself.

PHILIP (*calmly—shaking the ash of his cigarette on to the carpet*). Have I? You mean, I haven't been to one of you chaps.

DEXTER. You haven't been to a doctor at all?

PHILIP. I've been to somebody just as good. You should read his testimonials. Shall I go and fetch them?

ANTHONY (*dryly*). No, thanks.

PHILIP. Of course, you think they're all rot. You chaps always do—up against medical etiquette, and all that sort of thing. I know. But this man swears he's hit on the rock-bottom cure, and he's got reams of printed stuff to prove it. Testimonials from all sorts of big people. I've read 'em. I've no reason to think he's a liar.

ANTHONY (*pointedly*). And has his treatment made you any better?

PHILIP. How can I tell? It looks worse; but he says that's the disease coming out.

(ANTHONY and DEXTER glance at one another and smile.)

DEXTER. Good traditional old lie. Go on, Philip—you are most entertaining.

PHILIP. Entertaining, do you call it? I don't. I'm beginning to think that chap hasn't got quite the right thing for *me*. He may be all right for other people; but my complaint seems to baffle him somehow. So I'm letting you chaps have a go at me. And, what's more, I'm going to let the governor pay. I've stood the racket of that London man myself, and it's pretty well cleaned me out.

ANTHONY (*gravely*). Does your father know what is the matter with you?

PHILIP (*airily—lighting another cigarette*). I haven't told him. But I expect the old boy has guessed. He hasn't said anything, though.

ANTHONY. You will have to tell him.

PHILIP (*looking up coolly*). Oh! Shall I? Why? Supposing I refuse?

ANTHONY (*very stiffly*). If you put it that way—well . . . But I thought you said he was going to pay. And he is your father.

PHILIP. Well, it's *my* complaint.

ANTHONY. Which may affect other people.

PHILIP (*sitting up abruptly*). Oh, no. I'm not that sort of cad.

ANTHONY. All the same, you ought to tell your father. It will make things much easier for you.

PHILIP. How easier?

ANTHONY (*severely*). You are engaged to be married, I understand.

PHILIP (*flushing*). Er—yes. But I'm not getting married immediately.

ANTHONY. So I should hope.

PHILIP. What then?

ANTHONY (*emphatically*). You mustn't get married at all: not for a very long time, I mean.

PHILIP (*getting up and going towards ANTHONY*). What! Do you mean to say I can't get married in six or eight months?

ANTHONY (*gravely*). I do.

PHILIP. You can't cure me in six months?

ANTHONY. That is so.

PHILIP (*flinging himself back into his chair*). Then I don't think much of you doctors. T'other chap says he can. What do you say, Dexter?

DEXTER. I agree with Dr. Anthony.

PHILIP. Oh, do you?

ANTHONY (*hastily*). What we mean is, that, although we can get rid of all your symptoms, we can't be sure that all the poison will be out of you in six months—or even in twenty-six months. And, until it is all out, you *must not marry*.

PHILIP. Oh! Then, as I say, I don't think much of your blooming drugs and things. Other people say they can be certain.

DEXTER. You had much better tell your father, Philip. You *are* in rather a mess, you know. And he has asked Dr. Anthony to see you.

PHILIP (*yawning*). Oh, all right; have it your own way. Hullo—by Gad—here he is.

(*The door has opened, and SEPTIMUS MORTON comes in. He is wearing a nightshirt and bedroom slippers, and has a blanket wrapped round him. His hair and beard are disarranged. Evidently he has come straight from his bed.*)

MORTON. Oh! (*He hesitates.*) I didn't know you were in 'ere.

(ANTHONY and DEXTER hasten towards him.)

ANTHONY. Mr. Morton! (DEXTER *laughs*.) You ought to be in your bed.

MORTON (*gruffly*). What for? That's what my wife says. I suppose you are in league with 'er.

PHILIP (*interested*). I say, Dad, what are you in that rig for?

MORTON (*snappishly*). Because your mother's 'idden my clothes.

DEXTER (*cheerfully*). Only way to keep you in bed, Mr. Morton. My suggestion.

MORTON. Oh, was it? (*He comes in and shuts the door.*) I suppose you've been discussing me, you two.. (*He turns to PHILIP.*) What are you doin' 'ere? You aren't dressed, neither.

PHILIP. They've been discussing me, too.

MORTON. Ah! (*He goes to the cupboard and takes out a glass, whiskey decanter, and syphon. He mixes a drink and sips it.*) That's better. 'Ave one, Doctor? (To ANTHONY.)

ANTHONY. No, thank you, Mr. Morton.

MORTON. Dexter?

DEXTER. No, thanks. Too early for me.

MORTON. Oh, is it? It's never too early for me. (*He finds a pipe on the mantelpiece and proceeds to fill it.*) Mrs. Morton won't let me smoke in bed, so (*he strikes a match and lights his pipe*) I've come down.. (*He sits down before the fire and warms his bare legs.*) I suppose you two want to make out I'm very bad—but I'm not.

ANTHONY. Not *very* bad, Mr. Morton; but we've got a little advice to give you presently. Perhaps we had better talk about your son first.

MORTON. Right. (*He smokes with great content.*) Nothing much wrong with Philip, is there?

ANTHONY. Well—er—— (*He hesitates.* MORTON *looks up suspiciously.*)

MORTON. What's the matter?

ANTHONY. Perhaps Mr. Philip had better speak for himself.

MORTON (*nodding his head knowingly*). Oh, that's it, is it? I guessed as much. Been gettin' into mischief, 'ave you, Philip? You silly young fool—why didn't you look where you were goin'? I warned you.

PHILIP (*offhand*). Did you, Dad? I never heard you.

MORTON. Didn't you? Per'aps I forgot. Anyway, you'd better 'urry up and get cured. Dr. Anthony will tell Dexter what to do. Then you and 'e can do it. That's all, isn't it, Dr. Anthony?

ANTHONY (*who is sitting away from the fire, beyond MORTON*). I'm afraid it isn't as simple as all that, Mr. Morton. We have been impressing on your son that he mustn't think of getting married for a long time to come.

MORTON (*with great disgust*). Oh, 'ave you? Sort of thing you would do. Do you mean to say you can't cure 'im in a fortnight or so?

ANTHONY. It will take a great many fortnights, I'm afraid.

MORTON (*turning round in his chair to look hard at ANTHONY*). But I want 'im married. I want 'im married soon. 'E's goin' to marry the Vicar's daughter. That's a step up for 'im. If the weddin's put off people will ask questions, and that won't be nice. I shouldn't wonder if they don't ask me to be Mayor next November; but they won't if there's any ugly talk.

ANTHONY. I'm very sorry, Mr. Morton; but the wedding *will* have to be put off.

MORTON (*to PHILIP*). You—young—fool. Why the

deuce couldn't you take care? (*Suddenly furious and rising from his chair and flapping his blanket.*) Confound you—spoilin' it all. I won't 'ave it: I tell you, I won't 'ave it.

(*He empties his glass and reaches for the decanter.*)

PHILIP. I'm very sorry: I didn't do it on purpose. (*He starts forward.*) Hi—look out.

(*MORTON has got the end of his blanket perilously near the fire. PHILIP retrieves it.*)

Don't set yourself on fire, or you'll spoil everything.

MORTON (*grows unamiably and mixes his second drink*). You've got to cure 'im—See? (*This to ANTHONY.*) That weddin's goin' to come off. If you won't cure 'im, somebody else will. I know it can be done. I wasn't born yesterday.

ANTHONY (*stiffly*). We must warn you, Mr. Morton, of the consequences. And—er—we must *insist* that there shall be no talk of marrying for a long time to come. Mr. Philip, I hope you understand.

MORTON (*sourly*). Oh—you must insist, must you? See 'ere—I'm a plain man, and I speak my mind in a plain way: you doctors are all right in your place—I shall listen to what you 'ave to say about *my* complaint presently—but you mustn't go too far. You don't rule the country yet.

DEXTER (*very affably*). By Jove, we don't.

MORTON (*glances with disfavour at him*). And when Philip marries is for *me* to decide.

ANTHONY. And what about the lady? Will you let her run into danger with her eyes shut?

MORTON (*spluttering*). The lady! You don't think I would let anyone talk to a lady about this sort of thing, do you? What next, I wonder?

ANTHONY. Ah. You think a woman ought not to be warned if there is danger ahead?

MORTON (*explosively*). I think you doctors want to poke your noses into other people's private affairs a sight too much. And I think there are some subjects that ought *never* to be mentioned to women. *Never*. Do you follow me? It isn't decent.

ANTHONY. Ah—yes. Your wife, for instance?

MORTON. What—my wife? Me tell 'er about Philip! It would kill 'er. Mrs. Morton's an extremely religious woman.

ANTHONY. I see. (*He glances hopelessly at DEXTER.*) Well—(*he becomes very earnest*) let me tell you this, Mr. Morton—and you can like it or not, as you please—if your son marries within the next six months he will be guilty of a crime; and you, if you let him marry, will be guilty of another crime. Do I make myself plain?

MORTON (*somewhat impressed*). Go on—don't mind me.

ANTHONY. I have nothing to add.

MORTON. Oh—'aven't you? I'm glad to 'ear it. I'll think about it. 'Ere, Philip—get out. You've 'eard what the doctors 'ave to say about you. It's my turn now.

PHILIP. Right. (*He gets up and begins to go—all very affably.*) Good-bye, Dr. Anthony. Good-bye, Dexter. See you again soon. I suppose I'll have to swallow your beastly poisons.

(*He goes out.*)

MORTON (*sitting back comfortably in his chair*). Well—what about me?

ANTHONY (*suavely*). We have been talking about you, Mr. Morton; and we are agreed that you ought to take

things a little more quietly. You are not so young as you used to be.

MORTON (*warming his legs, and smoking his pipe in great contentment.*) Go on—I know all about that. Get to business.

ANTHONY. You have overstrained your digestion somewhat. You should pay attention to diet. No red meat for a time: no made dishes. All very simple—and—er—a glass of white wine with your lunch, and perhaps a couple at dinner. No spirits, you understand: no spirits at all.

MORTON (*gruffly*). Oh—yes—I understand. Very nicely put. You mean, I drink too much.

ANTHONY (*taken aback*). Oh—er—I—er—that is, we—er—

MORTON (*chuckling*). Don't put yourself out. I understand. Very sound advice—*which—I shan't take*. See? *Which—I—shan't—take*. I'm quite contented as I am. It's only my wife as is anxious. *I'm* all right.

(*He takes a good drink of his whiskey and soda.*)

ANTHONY (*shrugs his shoulders*). As you will, Mr. Morton. Of course, we can't dictate to you.

MORTON. No good. I'm too old to be dictated to.

(*The door opens and MRS. MORTON comes in. She starts as she catches sight of MORTON. Then she goes swiftly towards him.*)

MRS. MORTON (*severely*). Septimus!

MORTON (*guiltily*). Eh! (*He drops his pipe and gets up.*)

MRS. MORTON. Septimus—I left you in bed.

MORTON (*weakly*). So you did, my dear.

MRS. MORTON. What are you doing down here?

MORTON. Talking to the doctors—can't you see?

MRS. MORTON (*glances disapprovingly at ANTHONY and DEXTER. Evidently she thinks they have been aiding and abetting MORTON in his act of insubordination*). Come back to bed at once.

MORTON (*resigned*). All right. But where's the need for all this 'urry?

MRS. MORTON. Come along, Septimus.

(MORTON *folds his blanket round him—glances shamefacedly at the doctors, and follows MRS. MORTON out of the room.*)

ANTHONY (*he and DEXTER exchange glances*). Hopeless.

(DEXTER *laughs*. ANTHONY *strolls round the room looking at the pictures. DEXTER looks at him.*)

DEXTER. Pity they aren't both Panel Patients, isn't it? We could deal with them properly then.

ANTHONY (*turning sharply*). Eh—what? (*Looks at his watch.*) My word, I must be off. If I'm quick I may escape Mrs. Morton. You'll explain to her, won't you? Good-bye.

(*He goes out hurriedly, followed by DEXTER. As they leave the room, PHILIP, dressed in a comfortable flannel suit, comes in.*)

DEXTER (*over his shoulder*). See you later.

PHILIP. Right.

(PHILIP *wanders aimlessly about the room, fingering one thing, picking up another. He finds a box of cigarettes, strikes a light and begins to smoke. Stands irresolutely in the middle of the room.*)

PHILIP. Oh, damn!

(*Wanders about again, warms his hands at the fire, picks up a paper, looks at it, puts it down again. Obviously he is considerably upset. Presently MRS. MORTON comes in. She, too, seems upset.*)

PHILIP. Hullo, mother—those doctors gone?

MRS. MORTON. Yes, they've just gone. I could get hardly a word out of them. (*She sits down.*) I don't very much like Dr. Anthony. Considering the fee he charged he might have given me a little more of his time. As it was, I only just caught him on the doorstep, and he was off in his car before I could get him to answer more than about three questions.

PHILIP. I expect he was in a hurry. Enormous practice, they say.

MRS. MORTON (*after a pause*). What exactly did he say about you, Philip dear?

PHILIP. Oh—ah—nothing much. Said I was run down, and all that sort of thing. You know—the sort of thing doctors always say.

MRS. MORTON (*anxiously*). Is that all, dear? I am sure he said more than that. You haven't been looking well for a long time. A mother notices little things, Philip.

PHILIP (*laughing mirthlessly*). I'm all right, mother. Don't you worry about me.

MRS. MORTON. But I can't help worrying. You see, I have looked after you ever since you were a baby; and now, just when you are going away from me, you aren't well. I only hope Jean will take care of you. She is very young. And—Philip—I asked Dr. Anthony whether you were strong enough to marry, and he wouldn't answer. What do you suppose he meant?

PHILIP (*rather irritably*). How should I know? I'm not in his confidence.

MRS. MORTON. But, Philip, didn't he say something about it to you?

PHILIP (*reluctantly*). Oh, well——

MRS. MORTON (*pleadingly*). Philip, you *must* tell me. He *did* say something.

PHILIP (*with an air of resignation*). Well, mother, if you insist—— But I didn't want to worry you. It really isn't anything, I'm sure. Anthony says there's some heart weakness or something. Nothing at all serious; but he insists that I shall not get married just yet.

MRS. MORTON (*breathlessly*). Heart weakness! Oh, Philip *dear*! Sit down at once. You mustn't stand if your heart is weak. Really—you must go and rest. Won't you go and lie down, dear?

PHILIP (*laughing*). My dear mother, don't be so dreadfully upset. Please don't. You'll make me begin to believe I really am bad.

MRS. MORTON (*dolefully*). I wish I could (*dabs her eyes with her handkerchief*). Then, perhaps, you would take some care of yourself. I *knew* how it would be. You *would* row in those dreadful boat-races at Cambridge. Terribly weakening to the heart, I have always been led to understand. And you *will* play football, in spite of all I say.

PHILIP. Hm—yes. I suppose I shall have to give up football. Anyway, I haven't been playing lately, have I, mother? Your entreaties have had some effect. (*He tries to look less of a humbug than he feels, and succeeds.*)

MRS. MORTON. Philip dear, you have made me very anxious. What did Dr. Anthony mean by saying you are not fit to marry?

PHILIP (*briskly*). Oh, Anthony's an old woman. I beg your pardon—I mean, he makes a lot of fuss about nothing.

MRS. MORTON. But he is very clever. Everybody

says how clever he is. A man who can charge the fees he does must be clever. I wonder why Dr. Dexter didn't find out about your heart.

PHILIP. He did.

MRS. MORTON. But he never said so.

PHILIP. Dexter gave me exactly the same advice as Anthony.

MRS. MORTON. But how could that be? He is only an ordinary doctor. Why, he is on the Panel. He *couldn't* know so much about you as Dr. Anthony.

PHILIP. Well, he said the same, anyway.

MRS. MORTON (*anxiously*). About your heart, Philip?

PHILIP. Yes, he said exactly the same about my heart as Anthony did.

MRS. MORTON (*covers her face with her hands*). Oh, Philip, then it *must* be serious.

PHILIP. On the contrary, they both promised that, if I do as they say, I shall get all right.

MRS. MORTON (*bewildered*). But how can that be, if you must not marry? There must be something *dreadful* the matter if you mustn't marry.

PHILIP. My dear mother, don't you ever read the newspapers? The doctors want to boss the whole show. Why, if they had their way, nobody would ever get married without a medical examination. Marriage would be more difficult than life insurance. Anthony is a faddist, and Dexter is an ass. I'll tell him so when I see him.

MRS. MORTON (*shakes her head dolefully*). It's no good trying to make light of it, Philip. It's too serious for that. I know what heart weakness is.

PHILIP (*smiling doubtfully*). Do you, mother? I wonder——

MRS. MORTON. Yes, Philip, I do. And—— (*she collapses, crying quietly*).

PHILIP. Mother—please don't. It really isn't necessary. (*He lays his hand on her shoulder*.)

(MRS. MORTON *kisses him impulsively and hurries out of the room*.)

PHILIP (*puts his hands in his pockets, and walks up and down the room*). Damn! (*He stands thoughtfully in the middle of the room. There is a knock at the door*.) Come in. (DEXTER *comes in*.) Hullo, you come back?

DEXTER (*walking up to him*). Yes. I want to talk to you, Philip.

PHILIP. Do you? Talk away, then. By the way, I'm suffering from heart weakness; and don't you forget it. (*He sits down*.)

DEXTER. Oh, are you? That's for your mother's consumption, I presume.

PHILIP. Naturally.

DEXTER (*stands on the hearthrug and looks down at PHILIP*). You always were a gifted liar. But you'll find heart weakness an inconvenient complaint to live up to. Your mother is bound to know something about it, and she will take measures for your good.

PHILIP (*gloomily*). She has begun already.

DEXTER (*laughing*). Good. Serves you right. Wants you to go and lie down, I suppose.

PHILIP. That's it. Of course, I'm not going to.

DEXTER (*lights cigarette*). But you'll have to. You should have chosen some other complaint.

PHILIP (*twists irritably in his chair*). It's too late now. I told her Anthony had diagnosed that, and you had backed him up. She was rather surprised to hear you agreed with Anthony. She couldn't understand a

Consulting Physician and a Panel Doctor arriving at the same conclusion.

DEXTER. Which you had invented. She wouldn't. By Gad, Philip, I'll make you sit up for this. I've had half an hour of Anthony over you. I don't think he enjoyed it much, though.

PHILIP (*more cheerfully*). Did he patronise you?

DEXTER. He didn't. He only tried to. But, see here, Philip, this really is serious. If you go and get married soon there'll be the devil of a mess. You young chaps don't realise what marriage may mean: we doctors do. We have to straighten out the mess; and sometimes it isn't a pretty job.

PHILIP. Oh, rot! I can get cured all right.

DEXTER. Yes—with luck—in time. But you've been a double-dyed young ass wasting time with that quack.

PHILIP (*stiffly*). Don't go quite so fast. My man isn't a quack. For two pins I'll go back to him. You fellows call everybody a humbug who doesn't wear your sort of degree. But you don't know everything. Are you quite certain he hasn't discovered a cure about which you are ignorant?

DEXTER. Quite.

PHILIP (*shrugs his shoulders*). Well, I'm not. This man says he can make me ready to marry in six months.

DEXTER. And I say he is a liar.

PHILIP. You can say what you please. It doesn't alter my opinion.

DEXTER. Don't be an ass. In this sort of thing your opinion isn't worth a damn.

PHILIP. So you say.

DEXTER (*stepping forward*). So I *know*. Look here, Philip, at the back of me is the accumulated experience of scores of men who have worked patiently for years,

just in order that they might know. Your man simply wants to get rich.

PHILIP (*obstinately*). So you say. Where's your proof?

DEXTER. Our fellows have given their discoveries to the world: your man hasn't. See the difference?

PHILIP. Perfectly. Your men weren't businesslike. Mine is.

DEXTER. And that appeals to you?

PHILIP. Of course it does. I'm a business man myself.

DEXTER (*turning away in disgust*). Then God help Jean Grant.

PHILIP (*hotly—starting up*). What do you mean?

DEXTER (*they stand confronting one another*). I mean just this—that I don't care a tinker's cuss for you; but if you marry that girl I'll do all I can to get you kicked out of decent society.

PHILIP. But you can't. You can't tell. No one knows except the governor, and you and Anthony and me. We shan't tell, and you can't. It's against medical etiquette.

DEXTER (*very coldly*). So you intend to get married, in spite of all we've said?

PHILIP. When my London man has put me right.

DEXTER. Damn your London man!

PHILIP (*turning away*). Certainly, if it gives you any satisfaction. But I'm going to him. *You* don't seem to understand my case.

DEXTER (*hotly*). Curse your impudence.

PHILIP (*looking hard at DEXTER*). Look here, Dexter, I'm getting tired of you. You've been paid for what you've done, and there's an end of it. If there's anything owing, send in your bill.

DEXTER. Oh, go to the devil. (*He makes for the door, which opens and MRS. MORTON comes in.*)

MRS. MORTON (*reprovingly*). Dr. Dexter! I hope you are not letting Philip excite himself. I'm sure excitement is very bad for a weak heart.

DEXTER (*grimly*). It is. He would be much better in bed, Mrs. Morton.

MRS. MORTON. Is his heart *very* weak, Doctor?

DEXTER (*emphatically*). Terribly.

MRS. MORTON (*anxiously*). Philip—you hear what the doctor says. Do come and lie down, dear.

PHILIP (*explosively*). I'll be—— (*checks himself*) I mean—all right, mother.

MRS. MORTON. And you must have a cup of beef tea. Beef tea is sustaining, isn't it, Doctor?

DEXTER. Most sustaining, Mrs. Morton. He ought to have a very bland diet—a cup of beef tea, and a little milk pudding, and that sort of thing, *with plenty of rest*: an hour on his bed in the forenoon, and two hours after lunch, every day.

MRS. MORTON. You hear that, Philip?

PHILIP (*gloomily*). Yes, I hear it.

MRS. MORTON. Come along, dear—let me help you.

(*He leans on her arm, and they go out. DEXTER stands looking after them with a cynical smile on his face.*)

CURTAIN

Act II

SCENE.—*The REVEREND PERCIVAL GRANT'S study in Middlewich Vicarage. It is a comfortable, but by no means showy room, well furnished with rather solid-looking books, arranged tidily in book-cases round the walls. In the far wall there is a door in the right corner, leading to the passage. In the right wall is the fire-place, with a door, leading into the drawing-room, beyond. In the left wall is the window. There is a large writing-table close to the window, with a swivel chair before it, its back to the foot-lights. There are several arm-chairs, etc., scattered about.*

TIME.—*Six months later (i.e. summer), late afternoon.*

The REVEREND PERCIVAL GRANT is reading the "Church Times" in an arm-chair. He is a rather weary-looking, time-worn man, clean-shaven, aged about sixty. A piano is playing ragtime in the next room. The door from the drawing-room opens (and consequently the music is heard more distinctly) and MRS. GRANT comes in. She is a cheery, rather determined-looking woman, about fifty-five years old).

GRANT (*looking up and nodding at the drawing-room door*). Jean seems happy.

MRS. GRANT (*closing door and coming forward*). Poor Jean. She has had a letter from Philip. I expect that is why she is letting off steam on that piano.

GRANT (*ruefully*). Hm—yes. How about my sermon? I shall have to explain to Jean that I find it difficult to write sermons to a ragtime accompaniment.

MRS. GRANT (*strolling about the room and putting books and papers straight*). But you aren't writing a sermon, Percival.

GRANT (*shrugs his shoulders*). I'm preparing to write a sermon.

MRS. GRANT (*pausing and looking closely at him*). By reading the "Church Times"?

GRANT (*on the defensive*). I'm getting ideas.

MRS. GRANT (*laughs*). From the "Church Times"? You know perfectly well you don't get ideas for sermons from the "Church Times"; and if you did you wouldn't dare to preach them. Your congregation would never stand that. You read that paper for amusement.

GRANT. Well, what if I do? It is extraordinarily amusing at times; but I read it for instruction, too. I learn a lot of things from it.

MRS. GRANT (*turning away*). I can quite believe that.

GRANT (*looking at her with a twinkle in his eye*). I wonder what you mean by that. (*Thoughtfully.*) I wonder what you women mean by lots of things.

MRS. GRANT (*coming nearer to him and sitting down*). Do you, Percival?

GRANT (*putting his paper on the floor*). Yes—I do. For instance, you've been seeing a good deal of Dr. Dexter.

MRS. GRANT (*looking at him*). Yes. And so?

GRANT (*rather solemnly*). He's a young man in a hurry. He wants to put everything right in about five minutes. I like Dexter; but I don't know that I agree with him. In fact, I think I may say that I disagree with him fervently.

MRS. GRANT. Yes?

GRANT. This scheme of his—to talk openly about

things that most people agree should not be talked about openly—I don't like it.

MRS. GRANT. No ?

GRANT. Of course, there are evils : we know there are evils. But these doctors are rather apt to over-emphasise the materialistic side of the evils. They look too much at the effects—— Er—Jean seems *very* happy.

MRS. GRANT. Poor Jean. (*She gets up.*) Shall I go and tell her to stop playing ?

GRANT (*rather peevishly*). I shall have to finish that sermon *some* time.

MRS. GRANT (*shortly*). Yes, I suppose so. But you needn't begin just yet. Tell me a little more why you don't agree with Dr. Dexter.

GRANT. You know my views quite well, Mary. And really—— (*He picks up his paper and flaps it impatiently.*)

MRS. GRANT. You mean you want to read the "Church Times."

GRANT (*laughs*). Well—I don't get very much time for reading. And (*he glances at the door*) ragtime music doesn't fit in very well with serious discussion, does it ?

MRS. GRANT (*takes a step or two toward the door*). I'll go and tell Jean to stop playing.

GRANT (*raises his hand*). No, please don't do that. I'll read the paper till she has finished.

MRS. GRANT (*turns and stands looking hard at him*). Percival, do you realise how bad a time Jean has been having ? All the uncertainty : all the anxiety of Philip being ill, and away——?

GRANT (*surprised*). But there's nothing much wrong. He only strained his heart rowing. Lots of young men at the Universities do that.

MRS. GRANT (*doubtfully*). He left the University a long while ago, Percival. I hope it is nothing more serious than a strain.

GRANT (*reassuringly*). That sort of thing often doesn't shew itself at once. And, anyway, Philip didn't consult anyone but Dexter till six months ago. More fool he. You can't expect a mere provincial practitioner to diagnose anything out of the common.

MRS. GRANT. I'm sure Dr. Dexter is very clever; and he is very sympathetic and observant. I wish you would get him to tell you about the babies at the hospital. Poor little things—they haven't done any harm; but they have to suffer——

GRANT (*interrupting hastily*). Ah, yes. Very sad, I'm sure. But about Philip—I thought you said he was all right again.

MRS. GRANT. He said so, in his last letter. That London specialist has quite cured him, it seems. What a mercy it is he went to London.

GRANT (*turning over the pages of his paper. Evidently he is much more interested in it than he is in PHILIP*). Yes, indeed. One should always go to London for anything serious.

(*He begins to read. MRS. GRANT glances at him, and then goes out quietly through the drawing-room door. The music ceases. Very soon GRANT appears to be amused; and before long he puts down the paper and laughs heartily. The drawing-room door opens, and JEAN comes in. She is a pretty, lively-looking girl of about twenty-one.*)

JEAN. May I come in, father?

GRANT (*glancing up*). Eh! Oh, is that you, Jean?

JEAN. I hope I am not interrupting your ideas for a sermon.

GRANT (*doubtfully*). Well—as a matter of fact——

JEAN (*briskly*). As a matter of fact, I'm not. You were *laughing*. I'm sure you never laugh when you are making a sermon.

GRANT. But I do, Jean, very often. I assure you there are some remarkably funny things in the theological books.

JEAN. I shouldn't have thought so from your sermons, father.

GRANT (*tries to look severe and fails*). Jean! (*He laughs.*)

JEAN (*coming forward impulsively*). Oh, father, isn't it perfectly splendid? Philip is quite cured, and he is coming home to-day.

GRANT (*holds out his hand, which JEAN takes*). I'm so glad.

JEAN. Coming to-day! Think of it! And I haven't seen him for six whole months. (*She sits on the arm of his chair.*) It has been a *dreadful* time. When he told me he was ill and would have to go away, I thought I should die. He said it was his heart; and I thought people never got well from that.

GRANT. But he has got well.

JEAN (*enthusiastically*). Yes. Mustn't that London specialist be wonderful? I wish I could see him. I should like to tell him how grateful I am, and I'm sure I should want to kiss him.

GRANT. I wonder what Philip would say to that.

JEAN (*happily*). Oh, Philip wouldn't mind. Of course, the specialist is quite elderly. I'm certain he's a regular old dear, with spectacles and a long beard.

GRANT (*looks at her and smiles*). I wonder.

JEAN (*starting up*). I must fly. Philip may be here any minute, and I must put on a nice frock to welcome him.

GRANT. Yes (*he nods approvingly*). That would be a good plan.

JEAN (*kisses him hurriedly*). Good-bye, father. Mind you write a very nice sermon.

(*She runs out of the room, leaving the drawing-room door open. Immediately the ragtime begins again, but ceases abruptly after a few bars. GRANT picks up his paper once more and begins to read.*)

(*There is a knock at the door and a servant appears.*)

SERVANT. Dr. Dexter to see you, sir.

GRANT (*sighs ruefully and puts down paper*). All right : shew him in here.

(*DEXTER comes in.*)

GRANT (*rising*). Well, Dexter, what can I do for you ?

DEXTER (*cheerfully*). Evening, Vicar. (*He closes door and comes forward.*) I want to have a talk with you. I hope I'm not being a nuisance or anything.

GRANT (*not very cordially*). I'm always glad to see you. Won't you sit down ?

DEXTER (*sitting*). Thanks. May I smoke ?

GRANT. Oh, yes—er—certainly—please smoke.

DEXTER (*pulling out cigarette-case*). Have a cigarette, Vicar ? (*Proffers case.*)

GRANT (*shakes his head and looks about for a pipe. Evidently he is determined to make the best of a bad job : DEXTER has come to talk, so his sermon must wait*). I don't smoke those things : I prefer an honest pipe.

DEXTER (*affably*). Quite right. I wish I did. Cigarette smoking's a beastly habit. Wish I'd never cultivated it. (*Lights cigarette.*)

GRANT (*having found a pipe and the tobacco jar, sits down and fills his pipe*). Now then, Dexter, what can I do for you ?

DEXTER (*blowing a smoke ring neatly*). It's this way,

Vicar—you know that new Society of ours? We want you to be President.

GRANT. Yes? Which Society do you mean?

DEXTER (*looking in some surprise at him*). Surely you know all about our Society? Mrs. Grant's a member. She has told you about it, hasn't she?

GRANT (*rather stiffly*). Mrs. Grant has told me something about a Society——

DEXTER (*leaning forward and speaking with some feeling*). That'll be it. See here, Vicar—everybody knows how keen you are on helping other people, and all that: I assure you, you are a regular byword for Charity in Middlewich. You are mixed up in everything that's any good, and all that kind of thing. We want a President; and naturally you are the man to ask first. That's why I'm here.

GRANT (*smiling at DEXTER's compliments*). You haven't told me anything about your Society, Dexter.

DEXTER (*nodding his head ruefully*). No, I suppose I haven't. But you know all about it.

GRANT. Do I? You are referring to the Social Service Society?

DEXTER (*nods*). That's it—the S.S.S.

GRANT. Which is going to tell people all about things that ought not to be talked about.

DEXTER (*throwing the end of his cigarette into the fireplace*). If you like to put it that way——

GRANT (*emphatically*). Then I'm afraid I shall have to refuse.

DEXTER (*jumping up*). I said so. I told 'em you wouldn't do it. I knew it wasn't your line of country at all. I said to 'em—"How can you expect the Vicar to back us up in telling the truth publicly?"——

GRANT (*rather taken aback*). What did you say?

DEXTER (*hurriedly*). I beg your pardon, Vicar. I don't mean—at least, well, we are going to deal with *facts*; and you—oh, hang it all!—you know what I mean—(*he lights another cigarette, and laughs*). You know, Vicar, don't you?

GRANT (*smiling*). I'm not quite sure. I gather that you think I, being a parson, am rather a fool.

DEXTER. Oh, no—I assure you——

GRANT (*interrupting*). Never mind. The point I should like to make clear is, that while I sympathise with you, I cannot sympathise with your methods. To me, it is quite plain that you are beginning at the wrong end.

DEXTER (*sitting down again*). Ah, yes. Just exactly how do you mean?

GRANT (*getting up and beginning to walk backwards and forwards*). If I understand your objects rightly, you and your Society want to recognise openly the existence of certain terrible evils; in fact, you regard these evils as more or less inevitable.

DEXTER (*who is regarding GRANT with a queer sort of smile*). That is about it, Vicar. The evils are inevitable under existing conditions.

GRANT (*in distress*). By the evils you mean the consequences of Sin?

DEXTER. If you like to put it like that—yes. Personally, I prefer to talk about the consequences of Ignorance.

GRANT (*turning on him hotly*). Ignorance! Do you confuse Sin with Ignorance?

DEXTER (*flicking the ash from his cigarette*). Indeed I do. We doctors know that a great deal of what you Clergy call Sin is the result of no more than Ignorance. You've no idea what asses young men make of themselves

quite often. You see, we've been medical students ourselves.

GRANT (*in horror*). You——! What do you mean?

DEXTER (*laughing dryly*). It's a liberal education to be a medical student. We learn a great deal more than they teach us out of books. That is why doctors are such jolly good father-confessors for the average young man. But we want to get in before the father-confessor stage. See? That's one of the reasons for our Society.

GRANT (*miserably*). I'm afraid I don't see at all. It's *our* duty—the duty of the Ministers of the Church—to instruct people as to the results of evil-doing (*half to himself*). *We* have to tell them that “the Wages of Sin is Death.”

DEXTER (*quietly*). You haven't been very successful, have you? Forgive me for putting it brutally.

GRANT (*sinking back in his chair*). Successful? I don't know. How can I know?

DEXTER. Well, I assure you you are *not* successful. We doctors come across your failures. We try to manage so that the Wages of Sin shall be something short of death; but they are very disastrous. And so often it is not only the sinner that gets the Wages.

GRANT. Ah, yes. But then you look at the matter only from the physical standpoint. You think only of the mere bodily disease.

DEXTER (*quietly*). Do we? Look here, Vicar, are you aware that those wages often take the form of ailing babies that die miserably? When we see a woman's life spoilt by a succession of sickly babies, do you imagine we think only of *bodily* disease?

GRANT. Oh, I admit you think of your patients' minds—that also is your department. But we have to

think of something far higher than either the body or the mind. It is written—"The Soul that sinneth, it shall die." The *Soul*, Dexter. We are Physicians to the Soul.

DEXTER (*not at all impressed*). Ah, yes—Medical Officers of Health on the Spirit plane. I'm afraid your system of Spiritual Preventive Medicine has some flaws in it. You haven't yet learned how to deal with Spiritual Contagious Diseases.

GRANT (*rather scandalised and very much surprised*). Dexter!

DEXTER (*affably*). Only carrying on your metaphor. So you won't be President?

GRANT. How can I? I should have to acknowledge the existence of certain evils. In my position——

DEXTER. You mean, you would have to open your eyes to the existence of what you call "The Social Evil." And you would have to act accordingly. Most uncomfortable for you, I admit——

GRANT. I don't understand. What do you mean?

DEXTER. The "Social Evil" is there. It's no good pretending it isn't. In spite of all your sermons, and all your Sunday Schools, and all the countless things you have done, it flaunts its petticoats openly in every town, and most villages, in the land. We doctors see the consequences: we want to stop them.

GRANT. Yes—and how?

DEXTER (*beginning to walk up and down the room*). Well, first of all, we propose to tell people what the "Social Evil," as you call it, means, in terms of bodily disease. Secondly, we are going to agitate for a little more medical control of marriage.

GRANT (*aghast*). Surely you doctors might keep your hands off the Holy Sacrament of Marriage?

DEXTER (*cheerfully*). It's an institution that badly needs to have the doctor's hands laid on it. Look here, Vicar, can't you see that it is impossible to go on for ever as we are? To-day, any diseased man can get the blessing of the Church on his marriage; and the Church will bury his babies, as they arrive, provided they are properly baptised. (*Hotly*.) You footle round with objections about deceased wives' sisters, and you shut your eyes to the things that matter.

GRANT (*shaking his head fervently*). But you cannot expect me, or any other faithful Minister of the Church, to help in still further secularising the Holy Sacrament of Marriage.

DEXTER. Why not? We want to help you to make your Sacrament a little more holy, by making it clean.

GRANT (*gravely*). It was made holy by God.

DEXTER. But quite often men have spoilt all that.

GRANT. That may be, but we have no right to interfere with God's plan, and that is what all Parliamentary interference amounts to.

DEXTER (*looking in perplexity at GRANT*). Do you really mean that you wouldn't interfere under any circumstances? For instance, would you let your daughter marry a hopeless consumptive?

GRANT. Of course, as her father, I should dissuade her.

DEXTER. But as a clergyman you would marry somebody else's daughter to a hopeless consumptive?

GRANT. I couldn't help myself. In fact, I have done so, more than once. Certainly, I have done my best, by advice and exhortation, to prevent such marriages, but I could do no more.

DEXTER. Disease is not a just cause or impediment

—even when marriage will mean that the woman will become infected?

GRANT (*gloomily*). Disease is not a just cause or impediment in the ecclesiastical sense.

DEXTER (*sharply*). Then it ought to be. (*He prepares to go.*) Can't you see that, under this go-as-you-please system, marriage is quite often a crime? I must be off. Good-bye, Vicar. I'm sorry if I've hindered your sermon.

(*He makes for the door, and GRANT follows, to shew him out. As they approach the door MRS. GRANT comes in.*)

DEXTER. It's no good, Mrs. Grant: he won't.

(*He and GRANT go out. MRS. GRANT strolls across the room. Almost at once GRANT comes back.*)

MRS. GRANT. I'm sorry, Percival.

GRANT (*looking at her*). How *can* I? If I became President of this Society, where would my influence be? I should upset the whole parish. People wouldn't understand. They would *talk*. Besides, I don't approve.

MRS. GRANT. It's a pity. It's a thousand pities. I'm sure you could do untold good.

GRANT (*rather sadly*). Need we discuss it further, Mary? We have had it all over, you and I; and we have agreed to go our own ways. I shall continue to preach the consequences of Sin; you will try to help to soften the consequences. But, frankly, I do not consider it seemly to talk as your Society proposes to talk. There are some subjects that should never be mentioned in public.

MRS. GRANT. Very well, Percival—we will agree to differ. I'm afraid Dr. Dexter has interrupted your sermon-making dreadfully.

GRANT (*ruefully*). He has.

MRS. GRANT. Then I won't interrupt you any more.

(She is just going when the door opens and JEAN comes in with PHILIP.)

JEAN *(in great excitement)*. Mother—father—he's come! Philip has come back, and he is perfectly well again.

MRS. GRANT. } Why—Philip.

GRANT. } My dear fellow.

(They both hasten forward.)

MRS. GRANT. When did you come down?

PHILIP *(beaming)*. Just arrived. Came straight here from the station. I wrote and told Jean I was coming to-day. *(To JEAN)* You got my letter, didn't you?

JEAN. Oh, yes, I got your letter. I was expecting you.

MRS. GRANT. And are you really all right, Philip?

PHILIP. Ab-so-lute-ly right. That London man's a wonder.

GRANT. That's splendid. You are looking remarkably well.

PHILIP. Never fitter in my life, Vicar.

MRS. GRANT *(beaming on him)*. I expect you and Jean want to talk *(they look at one another and smile)*. And I know the Vicar wants to get on with his sermon. *(She leads them towards the drawing-room door.)*

GRANT. One minute, Philip.

(PHILIP stays behind. MRS. GRANT and JEAN go into the drawing-room.)

Your heart has quite got over that strain?

PHILIP. My heart? *(Suddenly he remembers.)* Oh, yes—nasty attack. Too much rowing, you know. You were a rowing man at Oxford, weren't you?

GRANT *(smiling pleasantly)*. Only in moderation. I never did any racing.

PHILIP. Oh—no racing? Just as well, perhaps. It

is a bit of a strain, I suppose. The doctors say so, anyway.

GRANT. But you are certain you are quite restored?

PHILIP. Quite certain. That London chap's top hole.

GRANT. Then (*he takes PHILIP'S hand*) God bless you, my boy.

(*There are sounds of ragtime from the piano in the drawing-room.*)

CURTAIN

Act III

SCENE.—*The REVEREND PERCIVAL GRANT'S study, as in Act II.*

TIME.—*Evening in summer, two years later.*

(GRANT is sitting, working at his writing-table. MRS. GRANT comes in.)

GRANT (*looking up*). How is the Scheme going? Did you have a satisfactory Meeting?

MRS. GRANT (*she looks worried*). I haven't been to the Meeting. (*She sits down wearily. GRANT swings round on his swivel chair.*)

GRANT. Oh! Not been to the Meeting! But I thought it was so important; and you were so keen on being there.

MRS. GRANT. So it was—most important. I didn't go, all the same.

GRANT (*surprised*). But I thought you had that big London specialist, Sir Something-or-other-Somebody, coming to tell you things.

MRS. GRANT (*dully*). So we had.

GRANT. And yet you didn't go. (*Sarcastically*) You missed the opportunity of hearing a big London doctor tell you all sorts of horrible details, about things that ought never to be mentioned in public.

MRS. GRANT (*looking at him piteously*). Don't you think that is rather an unkind way of putting it?

GRANT (*shrugs his shoulders*). Perhaps it is. But then, you and I don't look at this question from

quite the same standpoint. Frankly, I don't like it.

MRS. GRANT. I know you don't. You never did.

GRANT. Then don't you think it is rather unkind of you to persist? You make my position difficult. There has been a great deal of talk in the parish, and I am afraid it is getting worse.

MRS. GRANT. Of course. That was inevitable. There always is a lot of talk in the parish. If anyone does anything new somebody begins to talk, *spitefully*, at once.

GRANT (*seriously*). The talk is hindering my work—undermining my influence.

MRS. GRANT (*impetuously*). Why don't you stop it, then?

GRANT (*rather taken aback*). How can I stop it?

MRS. GRANT (*gets up and walks about restlessly*). The people who talk are Church people—some of them, anyway. Some of them are parish workers. You could stop them talking, if you wanted to.

GRANT (*shakes his head*). Not without offending them. Church workers are very easily offended.

MRS. GRANT (*smiling ruefully*). Yes—I know they are.

GRANT. And—forgive my speaking bluntly, Mary—I cannot help agreeing with them. To me, it *does* seem a deplorable thing for a Vicar's wife to set out deliberately to undo her husband's work.

MRS. GRANT (*turning sharply on him*). Whatever do you mean, Percival? Surely you don't suggest that I do that?

GRANT (*obstinately*). You must forgive me for speaking plainly.

MRS. GRANT (*much agitated*). Percival!

GRANT (*waves his hand to silence her*). You and your Committee are busy compromising with Sin.

MRS. GRANT (*hotly*). We are doing nothing of the sort.

GRANT (*in the most irritating parsonic manner*). Please! Let me finish. (MRS. GRANT *shrugs her shoulders and sits down*.) No doubt you are actuated by good motives; but, all the same, you and I are working from different ends.

MRS. GRANT (*looking up sharply*). What of that, if we arrive at some useful result when we meet in the middle?

GRANT (*shakes his head dolefully*). Ah, you say—"What of that?" It is *very* painful for me to talk like this. We worked together for so many years. It is the great sorrow of my life that you, of all people, should forsake the Church's way.

MRS. GRANT (*sitting up rigidly*). May I ask *when* I forsook the Church's way?

GRANT. When you joined that Committee, of course, and threw in your lot with those materialistic-minded doctors.

MRS. GRANT (*laughs*). Percival—you really are too ridiculous.

GRANT (*severely*). This is hardly a subject for laughter.

MRS. GRANT (*audaciously*). No—but when you talk like that, *you* are.

GRANT (*jumps up furiously*). I won't stand it. You not only undermine my work—you insult me.

MRS. GRANT (*quite calmly*). I don't insult you, Percival. Don't be so silly.

GRANT (*makes for the door*). I won't stop in the room.

MRS. GRANT (*severely*). Percival—come back. (*He hesitates*.) Come back, Percival. (*He takes hold of the door-handle*.) If you go on like that people *will* have something to talk about.

GRANT (*turns sharply*). What do you mean?

MRS. GRANT. They'll say you can't stand having the truth told you.

GRANT (*comes towards her*). But—but—how will they find out?

MRS. GRANT. Come and sit down, Percival, *please*. (*He hesitates and then does sit down.*) That's right. Now, look here—two years ago we made a compact. I was to try my method—to help the doctors: you were to go on with yours. I set out to do my part towards trying to make the consequences of sin rather less horrible: you went on preaching against sin.

GRANT. And I stuck to my side of the compact.

MRS. GRANT. We both did. Now what have we to shew?

GRANT (*bitterly*). What, indeed? You and your friends have made people talk.

MRS. GRANT. That's something to the good, anyway. It's more than you have done.

GRANT. Really—is that fair?

MRS. GRANT. Quite fair. We are drawing up a balance sheet. Anything is fair in a balance sheet. You ask your churchwardens. We have done a little—it isn't much, but it's something—to make people realise that some suffering, particularly children's, can be prevented.

GRANT. Ah, yes—how?

MRS. GRANT. By giving the doctors a little more power, for one thing.

GRANT (*disagreeing violently*). I have no faith in doctors.

MRS. GRANT. Haven't you? Not when you are ill? You have *heaps* of faith in doctors when you are ill, Percival. You see, a doctor may know perfectly well

that a man ought not to marry, because he has something or other the matter with him ; but the doctor can't prevent the man marrying. If he told what he knew he would have to face an action for libel, and he would lose his practice.

GRANT. Quite right, too. If doctors told all they knew there would be a pretty big mess.

MRS. GRANT. I agree with you. But a man—and a woman—might be asked to produce a clean bill of health before getting married.

GRANT (*starting up*). Horrible ! Horrible ! You would desecrate the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony with medical certificates !

MRS. GRANT. But you don't object to *Banns* Certificates.

GRANT (*waving his hand*). That is quite different. That is a matter of Church discipline—and law. What you are asking for is a matter of Hygiene—the Church has no concern with Hygiene. And you forget that if what you suggest were granted, we might be deprived of the divinely appointed object lessons of the consequences of Sin.

MRS. GRANT (*very quietly*). You wondered, two years ago, why I said I was sick of sermons. Do you understand now ?

GRANT (*coldly*). I do not.

MRS. GRANT. Ah, well—it was because so many sermons were founded on the belief in a God who *wanted* to hurt people. I never believed in a God of that sort.

GRANT (*very severely*). Stop ! I cannot listen——

MRS. GRANT. Very well, Percival. We will not continue this discussion. We can only do what we think right. But—but you didn't ask why I stayed away from the Meeting.

GRANT (*gruffly*). Didn't I?

MRS. GRANT. I was upstairs with Jean.

GRANT (*not interested*). Were you? She is going on all right, I suppose?

MRS. GRANT (*emphatically*). Jean is *not* going on all right.

GRANT (*surprised*). But the doctor said——

MRS. GRANT. Oh, yes, the doctor said—just the things that doctors do say.

GRANT. He said she would be fit to go back to her own house quite soon.

MRS. GRANT. Did he? I expect he only said that to soothe you. Doctors often say things to soothe you. He knew you were getting restive.

GRANT. Restive?

MRS. GRANT. Yes—he knew you thought it wasn't quite proper for her to be here, instead of in her husband's house.

GRANT (*irritably*). Well, what of that? A married woman ought to be in her husband's house.

MRS. GRANT (*looking hard at him*). And do you think that is the best place for Jean—all alone? Philip is out all day, remember, at his business. She was badly depressed after the first baby was born dead; and now that she has had a second dead baby she is worse.

GRANT. But she seems all right.

MRS. GRANT. Does she? I have been with her all the evening.

GRANT (*shortly*). If you are worried you had better send for the doctor.

MRS. GRANT. I've done that. Dr. Dexter has been, and he is coming back soon. He is getting Dr. Anthony over from Birmingham.

GRANT (*surprised*). Whatever for? Surely Jean

doesn't want *two* doctors. You never had two doctors after your babies were born.

MRS. GRANT (*sadly*). No—but *my* babies weren't always born dead. *Jean's* are.

GRANT (*somewhat impressed*). Poor Jean. I'm afraid it has been a sad disappointment for her.

MRS. GRANT. A . . . sad . . . disappointment! Is that all? (*Passionately*) You are a man—so I suppose you don't understand. You don't know what it is like, to go through all those weary, weary months, to get ready, to make the little garments, to furnish the cradle, and then, after the last awful pain—you don't know the pain of having a baby, and you may thank God you don't—to have Nothing.

GRANT. Aren't you getting a little sentimental? Of course, I am very sorry for Jean, and I am only too glad to have her here; but it must be very bad for Philip. We have to think of him. He has been disappointed too. I'm afraid he must be very lonely, poor fellow.

MRS. GRANT (*grimly*). I'm thinking of Jean.

(*There is a knock at the door and a servant appears.*)

SERVANT. Mrs. Morton.

MRS. MORTON (*bustling in*). Good evening, Vicar. (GRANT *gets up.*) (To MRS. GRANT) I've looked in to see why you weren't at the Meeting. It was *splendid*.

MRS. GRANT. Was it? I'm so glad. But I couldn't come.

MRS. MORTON. What a dreadful pity. Everybody was asking why you weren't there. Sir Samuel was wonderful—so clear—so definite.

GRANT (*fidgety*). Was he *very* outspoken, Mrs. Morton?

MRS. MORTON (*sitting down*). Oh, yes—he didn't mince matters.

GRANT. I'm sorry to hear it.

MRS. MORTON. Oh, I know you think we are very terrible people, but *somebody* must talk about these dreadful things.

GRANT. I can't see the necessity. And, as Vicar of this parish, I feel bound to say I think you are making a mistake. Our young people are becoming unsettled. (*He shakes his head ruefully and makes for the door.*) I'm afraid I must leave you. Please excuse me. (*Goes out.*)

MRS. MORTON (*sighing*). I'm so sorry. (*She gets up and crosses impetuously to MRS. GRANT.*) I can't tell you how sorry I am, dear. It must be dreadful for you to have the Vicar always in opposition.

MRS. GRANT (*smiling faintly*). It is as bad for you. Mr. Morton—

MRS. MORTON (*cheerfully*). Oh, of course, Septimus is hopeless. But, then, he isn't the Vicar. He only growls. He doesn't get *pained*, and he doesn't quote Scripture. I wish people wouldn't quote Scripture—it makes one feel so cross.

MRS. GRANT. People have begun to talk.

MRS. MORTON. Naturally. People haven't got used to women taking their own line.

MRS. GRANT (*seriously*). But I'm the Vicar's wife, Priscilla.

MRS. MORTON (*squeezing MRS. GRANT's hand*). You poor dear! I know what you mean. People think you ought to be a sort of colourless creature, with no opinion of your own. They won't understand that a Vicar's wife is a woman.

MRS. GRANT. It is all very difficult. And (*speaking slowly*) I am terribly anxious about Jean.

MRS. MORTON (*startled*). Why? Is she worse?

MRS. GRANT. I don't know. I don't know what to think. But she is very strange in her manner.

MRS. MORTON. You don't mean——

MRS. GRANT. I have sent for Dr. Anthony. Dr. Dexter suggested it.

MRS. MORTON. But—my dear——

MRS. GRANT (*very seriously*). Priscilla, Jean has had two dead babies. She was always a perfectly healthy girl before her marriage.

MRS. MORTON (*suddenly struck by what is evidently a most upsetting idea*). But — you — don't — mean — Philip?

MRS. GRANT. I don't think I mean anything. But Jean has something on her mind. She is strange—not herself. She never used to cry; but I have found her crying her eyes out over and over again. It isn't natural. She doesn't seem to get over that last dead baby. Poor girl—she *was* so looking forward to it. (*Impulsively*) Priscilla—what does it mean? A girl like Jean ought to have healthy children.

MRS. MORTON (*very quietly*). I don't know. How can I say? It *can't* be Philip's fault. I have never had a single moment's doubt about Philip. He always told me everything. There never were any secrets between us. He was never ill until he strained his heart with that horrid rowing at Cambridge. Of course, *we* know what young men are. But Philip——! No, I can't believe that.

MRS. GRANT. I didn't suggest anything against Philip. He is a dear fellow.

MRS. MORTON (*kisses her*). He *is* a dear fellow. He would do anything for Jean.

MRS. GRANT. Poor Jean!

(*They are silent—both thinking hard.*)

(The door opens and PHILIP comes in. He looks anxious.)

PHILIP. What—mother! You here! Nothing wrong, I hope. *(To MRS. GRANT)* How is Jean?

MRS. GRANT. She is not quite so well, I am afraid.

PHILIP *(alarmed)*. Then I hope you have sent for the doctor.

MRS. GRANT. Dr. Dexter has been.

PHILIP *(nervously)*. Oh, hang Dexter! If Jean is worse, we must have a specialist.

MRS. GRANT. Dr. Anthony is coming presently.

PHILIP *(does not seem pleased)*. Anthony!

MRS. GRANT. Yes. Dr. Anthony from Birmingham. Don't you like him?

PHILIP *(pulling himself together)*. Anthony's all right. But oughtn't we to have a specialist? I mean, a woman's man. Anthony's a general physician.

MRS. MORTON. If Dr. Anthony thinks so, he will say so, Philip. Let us wait until he has seen Jean.

PHILIP. Oh, certainly. Hullo—Come in.

(There is a knock at the door and DEXTER appears.)

PHILIP. Oh, it's you, Dexter—have you sent for Anthony?

DEXTER *(nods)*. He will be here almost immediately.

MRS. GRANT. Then I will go to Jean. *(To MRS. MORTON)* Will you come, too?

(MRS. GRANT and MRS. MORTON go out.)

DEXTER. Well?

PHILIP *(lights cigarette and smokes feverishly, taking no notice for a time. Then—)* Don't rub it in. You were right—curse you!

DEXTER. Of course we were right.

PHILIP *(furiously)*. I tell you—don't rub it in. I've had about as much as I can stand.

DEXTER (*affably*). I don't want to rub it in ; but——

PHILIP. Oh, yes, I know. "I told you so," and all that. I suppose I deserve it. But how was I to know that London man was a liar ?

DEXTER. Er—forgive me, Philip—we told you so. Didn't we ?

PHILIP (*irritably*). You did—damn you ! Why the devil didn't you kick me when you had the chance ?

DEXTER. If doctors made a practice of kicking all the patients who think they know better than the doctors they would have a strenuous time. But—I say, Philip, I'm sorry. Poor little Jean ! We've got to get her out of the mess.

PHILIP (*glares at him*). By Gad, you have. Damn it all, that's what you are for. I have got her in. Kick me if you like : call me all the names you please ; but, for God's sake, get her out.

DEXTER. We'll do what we can.

SERVANT (*at door*). Dr. Anthony.

(ANTHONY comes in.)

ANTHONY. Good evening, Mr. Morton.

PHILIP. Good evening, Doctor. Very good of you to come so soon (*impulsively moving forward to ANTHONY*). You'll do all you can ? For God's sake do your very best.

ANTHONY (*glances at DEXTER*). Certainly we shall do our very best. There's nothing very wrong, I hope.

PHILIP. It's my wife—Jean. (*He sinks into a chair and covers his face with his hands.*) Oh ! my God ! And it's all my fault.

ANTHONY (*puts his hand on PHILIP's shoulder*). Pull yourself together. Perhaps it isn't as bad as you think.

PHILIP (*looks miserably at ANTHONY*). Thanks. (*Nervously—laughs a little.*) Here—I'm in the way.

You two want to talk. I'll clear out. (*He rushes from the room.*)

ANTHONY (*glancing at the door as it slams, and then turning to DEXTER*). What's wrong? Didn't he do what we told him?

DEXTER (*shortly*). They've been married two years.

ANTHONY (*shrugs his shoulders*). With the inevitable consequences, I suppose?

DEXTER. She has had two dead babies—the last six weeks ago. You know what dead babies mean to a woman of an emotional type.

ANTHONY. But why did you send for me? This sort of thing is outside my line.

DEXTER. I know it is. But you saw the husband with me first of all; and I thought you had better come along now. We can get someone else as well, if you like.

ANTHONY (*nods*). Glad to help, if I can be of any use, of course. But—— I say, Dexter, *why* did he do it? We warned him.

DEXTER. He went back to that London Quack—told me to go to the devil and all the rest of it. You know the sort of thing. As usual, the Quack made him pay through the nose—his father, who's a bigger fool than he is, stumped up—and promised to cure him in six months. When the six months were up the Quack said he was all right, fit to marry, and all that; and the wedding came off. I did my best to stop it; but what could I do? The boy wouldn't listen, and the father simply got offensive when I spoke to him. No one else knew anything, and, of course, I couldn't tell.

ANTHONY. Hm. Yes—the usual story. And now?

DEXTER. If that girl doesn't alter soon we shall have to be thinking about a lunatic asylum for her. And—

what's more—I rather fancy she has some glimmering of the truth.

ANTHONY. The devil !

DEXTER. You see, her mother, and the boy's mother, too, have been going in pretty heavily for this new movement—investigating what they call "The Social Evil" and all that. They are out to try to prevent this kind of trouble happening. Naturally, the girl has learnt a thing or two.

ANTHONY. Dear, dear, dear—what a pity it is she didn't learn it before she got married.

(MRS. MORTON *comes in with* PHILIP.)

MRS. MORTON (*shaking hands with* ANTHONY). It is good of you to come so soon. (*To* DEXTER) Jean is quite ready : will you go up ?

(DEXTER *and* ANTHONY *go out.*)

MRS. MORTON. Philip, dear, you look awful. Come and sit down. You will get ill again if you are not careful. (PHILIP *sits down and buries his head in his hands. She fusses round him.*) Don't give way so, dear—I'm sure it isn't so bad as you think.

PHILIP (*miserably*). You don't know, mother.

MRS. MORTON. I have just seen Jean. Of course, she is upset—she has had two bitter disappointments. So have you, poor boy. But I don't believe she is really very ill. We shall have to cheer her up and get her not to give way so.

PHILIP. Please—mother—don't. Poor little Jean ! Oh, my poor little Jean ! All my fault.

MRS. MORTON (*starts, horror-struck*). Philip ! What do you mean ?

PHILIP (*looks up wearily*). I said it's all my fault.

MRS. MORTON (*recoiling*). But—Philip ! You don't mean——? Not you—— No, it can't be.

PHILIP (*almost savagely*). I tell you, mother, it is my fault. *Won't* you understand? I've got to tell somebody.

MRS. MORTON (*she sits rigidly upright, staring at him*). Philip! And I always thought you were not like other young men. Oh, Philip!

PHILIP. I don't know about what you call other young men. I suppose a good many of us make asses of ourselves at some time or another. I was unlucky.

MRS. MORTON (*in freezing tones*). I never expected to hear that my son had led a vicious life.

PHILIP (*startled*). Good Lord! But, mother, I haven't led a vicious life.

MRS. MORTON (*perplexed*). Then what in the world do you mean? You say it is your fault that Jean is ill.

PHILIP (*doggedly*). So it is. But—I was a fool *once*. There, do you understand? I *haven't* led a vicious life. I was a fool *once*.

MRS. MORTON (*coldly*). I'm afraid I don't understand. I can't see that that makes any difference.

PHILIP (*jumping up*). Oh, my God! I've had as much as I can stand. Ask my father.

(*He hurries to the door, which opens, and SEPTIMUS MORTON comes in.*)

MORTON (*looking about him in surprise*). 'Ere—what's all this? I dropped in to ask after Jean, and they said you was 'ere. I 'adn't expected to meet *all* the family. What's up?

MRS. MORTON (*glances at PHILIP*). Shall I tell your father, Philip?

PHILIP (*shrugs his shoulders*). He knows all about it.

MORTON (*realising the situation*). You don't mean to say you've been tellin' your mother? (*PHILIP does not answer.*) You damned young fool.

MRS. MORTON. Septimus—did you know?

MORTON. Of course I knew. Wasn't that enough?

MRS. MORTON. And yet you let him get married to Jean?

MORTON. Why not? 'E was all right. 'E went and got cured in London.

MRS. MORTON (*sadly*). He didn't get cured, Septimus.

MORTON (*fuming*). 'Oo says so? I tell you 'e *did* get cured. A man in London cured 'im. I know 'e did, because I paid 'is bill.

MRS. MORTON. Did you ask Dr. Dexter if he was cured?

MORTON. Damn Dexter.

MRS. MORTON. Or Dr. Anthony?

MORTON. Damn Anthony! I suppose they're jealous of the London man, and so they've been sayin' 'e's a liar. I know those doctors—wanted the fees they didn't get.

MRS. MORTON (*quietly*). You seem to forget that Jean has had two dead babies.

MORTON. Well, what of that? Lots of women 'ave dead babies, don't they?

MRS. MORTON. They do—more's the pity. But *why* do they have dead babies?

MORTON. 'Ow should I know? I'm not a doctor. (*Turning furiously on PHILIP*) Look 'ere—if you say a word about this I'll disown you. See? I'll disown you. I won't 'ave any scandal mixed up with my name.

PHILIP (*bitterly*). Do you think I want to talk about it?

MORTON (*savagely*). I don't know. If you're fool enough to tell your mother, you can't be depended on not to tell everyone else.

MRS. MORTON. I don't think Philip will tell anyone else, Septimus.

MORTON (*gruffly*). 'E'd better not.

MRS. MORTON. And—I do wish you'd explain. Philip says he has not led a vicious life; and yet he says he's responsible for Jean's illness. I don't understand.

MORTON (*explosively*). Of course you don't. You're a woman. Women aren't supposed to understand. Philip's a fool—that's all.

MRS. MORTON. Please explain, Septimus. Remember, I am Philip's mother.

MORTON. That doesn't make any difference. Women oughtn't to know about these things.

MRS. MORTON (*earnestly*). Not when they are so terribly affected by—these things?

MORTON (*spluttering*). Oh, well, if you *will* 'ave it—Philip went out to dinner one night with some of 'is friends. 'E 'ad too much to drink, and 'e made a fool of 'imself afterwards. There, now you know. It's common enough. That's it, isn't it, Philip?

PHILIP (*miserably*). Yes, I suppose so—Oh, curse those doctors! Why can't they hurry up?

MRS. MORTON (*gently*). Don't be impatient, Philip.

PHILIP (*passionately*). Impatient!

MRS. MORTON (*crosses over and lays a hand on his arm*). Poor boy! Forgive me, Philip.

MORTON (*disgusted*). Oh, Lord!

MRS. MORTON. I misjudged you, Philip.

PHILIP (*sinks in chair, his face buried in his hands*). Please, mother—don't.

MRS. MORTON. I am so dreadfully sorry for saying what I did.

PHILIP. Please——

MORTON (*irritably*). Why can't you leave the boy alone? It's fair sickenin', the way you go on.

MRS. MORTON (*turning to MORTON*). I can understand Philip, but (*with scorn*) I can't understand *you*, Septimus.

MORTON (*angry*). 'Ere—what d'you mean?

MRS. MORTON. It was you who were responsible for Philip's marriage. You urged it on. And all the time you knew the risk.

MORTON. I didn't never know nothin' about no risk. The London man said as 'e was all right.

MRS. MORTON (*gravely*). What about the doctors down here, Septimus?

MORTON. Damn the doctors down 'ere. They're no good. 'Ullo, 'ere they are.

(*The door from the passage opens and ANTHONY, DEXTER, and MR. and MRS. GRANT come in. They all look disquieted. MORTON regards the doctors with disfavour.*)

ANTHONY (*evidently upset*). Good evening, Mr. Morton.

MORTON (*gruffly*). Evenin'.

(*They settle about the room in chairs, except ANTHONY, who stands before the fire-place, and DEXTER, who leans against the writing-table.*)

ANTHONY (*hesitates*). Er—hm. (*All look at him inquiringly.*) I had thought—that is, Dr. Dexter and I had thought—it well—er—to speak out plainly. But— (*he glances at MR. and MRS. MORTON*).

MORTON (*realising the situation*). Go on—don't mind us.

ANTHONY. Thank you, Mr. Morton, *you* understand, of course; but Mrs. Morton—

MORTON (*vindictively*). Go on, Doctor. *Everybody* understands, it seems. (*He scowls at PHILIP.*)

MRS. MORTON. I understand, Dr. Anthony.

ANTHONY (*rather surprised. Exchanges a glance with DEXTER*). Oh, indeed.

GRANT (*fussily*). But *I* don't understand. *I* am utterly bewildered.

ANTHONY. You have just heard for yourself, Mr. Grant.

GRANT. And I decline to believe that any such calamity should befall *my* daughter. I am convinced that you doctors are mistaken. I shall send for a specialist from London at once.

ANTHONY (*coldly*). As you like, Mr. Grant.

DEXTER (*cheerfully*). You'll find him very expensive, Vicar ; and he'll only agree with us.

GRANT (*stiffly*). Thank you, Dr. Dexter, that is my affair. I shall please myself.

DEXTER. Certainly—of course. But——

GRANT. And if, as I will not believe, what you say is right, you might have prevented all this trouble. You are most blameworthy.

DEXTER (*glances at ANTHONY*). Thanks : of course it's our fault. You won't have the doctors interfering with Christian marriage——

GRANT (*angrily*). Sir !

DEXTER (*in no way put out*). I've heard you say so often enough. Then, when things go wrong, you blame us.

GRANT (*stiffly*). Really, Dr. Dexter.

ANTHONY (*frowns at DEXTER*). We haven't always seen eye to eye in these questions, have we, Mr. Grant ? But this is hardly the time to discuss that.

MORTON. Look 'ere, what's the good of all this talk ? Jean's bad. That's good enough for me. She's got to be made better—that's your job. (*He looks at ANTHONY*) Get on with it, you doctors. Come on, Priscilla—it's time we was 'ome. Comin', Philip ?

GRANT (*suddenly aware of PHILIP'S presence*). Philip, is what they tell me true ?

PHILIP (*exasperated*). Seeing that I don't know what they've told you, I can't say. I'm going to talk to Jean.

GRANT (*very solemnly*). Have you been a confirmed evil liver?

PHILIP (*wearily*). Good heavens, no! Ask my father, he'll tell you all about it. (*He makes for the door.*)

MORTON (*evidently sick of the whole subject*). I'll see you damned first.

(*He also makes for the door.*)

(*Suddenly from the drawing-room comes the sound of ragtime, played on the piano. PHILIP stops at the door, MORTON just behind him. All start to their feet.*)

MRS. GRANT. Whatever is that? (*She hurries across to the drawing-room door. The music ceases.*) Oh, Jean!

(*JEAN comes in through the drawing-room door. She looks very ill. Her hair is in two long plaits, hanging over either shoulder. She is wearing a pink dressing-gown over her nightdress.*)

JEAN (*walking into the middle of the room*). Did I disturb you at your sermon, father? (*She laughs.*) You never could write sermons to ragtime. (*Apparently she sees no one else, for she begins to sing:*)

“Through the night of doubt and sorrow,
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Hoping for a gay to-morrow,
Singing ragtime to the band.”

(*She stops and laughs again.*) That doesn't sound quite right.

MRS. GRANT. Jean! Jean dear?

(*The others regard her with horror, except the doctors, who plainly are interested.*)

JEAN. What's the matter, mother? I'm all right.

I won't play any more. Father doesn't like it. (*She goes up to GRANT and strokes his hair.*) Forgive your little Jean, father. I don't want to spoil your nice sermon. (*She sits down in a chair.*) Hullo, Philip—where have you been all this time? Oh, naughty, you haven't been near me for days. (*MRS. GRANT moves towards JEAN, but ANTHONY checks her.*) Wicked Philip—I shall have to tell your mother about you.

PHILIP. My God!

JEAN (*laughing again*). And there's old Daddy Morton. (*MORTON looks uncomfortable.*) Silly old Daddy Morton. You can give me a kiss if you like.

MORTON (*backing away from her*). I'll be damned if I will.

JEAN. What! Oh, you naughty man! Swearing! And there's Dr. Anthony. What are *you* doing here? Is there anybody ill? And Dr. Dexter, too. There *must* be somebody ill. (*Laughs loudly.*) It's me—me—little me. They think I'm ill. Stupid. I'm not ill. But I've lost my baby—my little baby. Where's my baby? (*She gets excited, and MR. and MRS. GRANT go to her, while ANTHONY and DEXTER move forward.*) Who's taken my baby? (*She shouts*) Ba-by! (*She jumps up and stares about her.*)

(Suddenly she becomes rational.)

JEAN. I know. My baby is dead. I mustn't have a baby. Why wasn't I told before?

PHILIP. Oh, my God!

JEAN. Philip—it's your fault.

PHILIP. Yes, Jean—it's my fault.

JEAN (*she grows excited again*). No, it isn't. It's all the fault of those silly doctors. You've got a weak heart. You strained your heart rowing at Cambridge.

I know (*with a cunning laugh*). Oh, I know all about weak hearts. (*She goes up to PHILIP and pats his cheek.*) Poor little heart. (*She darts off, and goes looking for something all over the room.*) Baby—where are you? I can't find you. Where have you gone? *Naughty baby, to hide from mother.*

PHILIP. I can't stand this. (*He goes over and puts one arm round JEAN.*) Come up to bed, dear.

JEAN (*suddenly quiet*). What? Bed! Of course. I'm tired. Bed-time. Oh, Philip! (*She throws her arms round his neck and bursts into a torrent of weeping. She is suddenly quite rational.*) Why did no one tell me?

CURTAIN

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